



## 12 Wrapped in Images: Body Metaphors, Petroglyphs, and Landscape in the Island World of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

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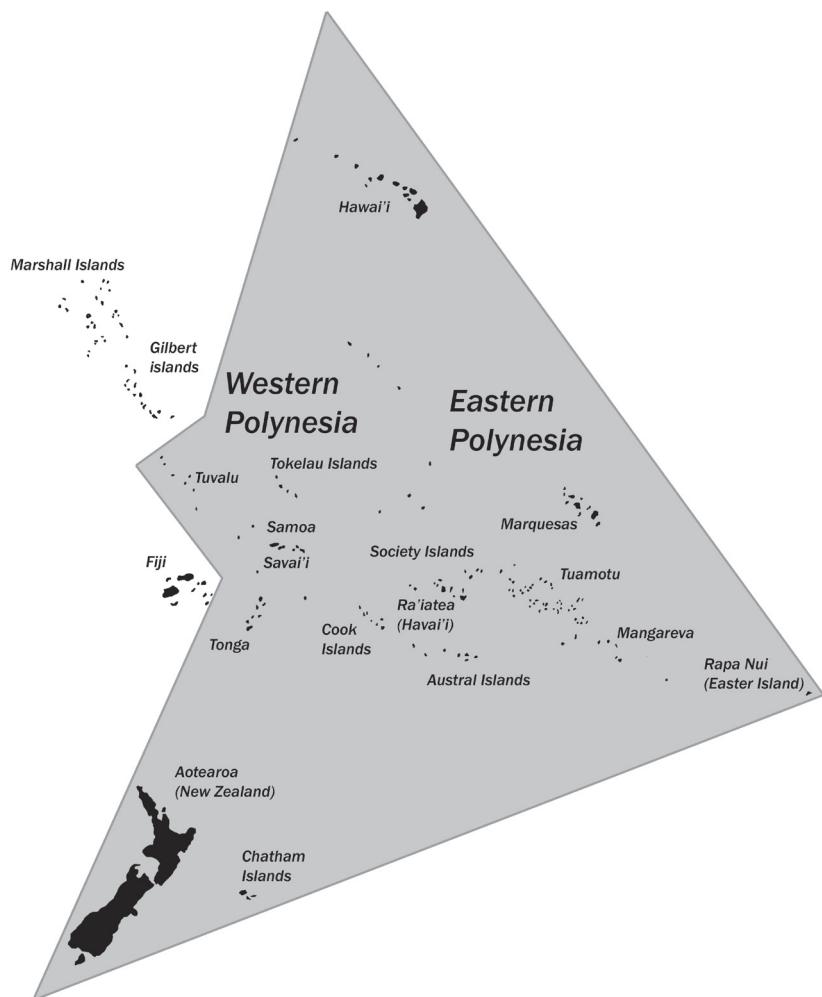
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Rapa Nui is known for its remoteness, often being described as the one of the most isolated places on the planet. This is due to its South Pacific location at the eastern tip of the Polynesian triangle, c. 2,300 miles west of the South American mainland and c. 1,300 miles east of its nearest neighbour Pitcairn Island (Figure 12.1). Despite earlier claims to the contrary (for example, Heyerdahl 1941, 1951), a wide array of evidence, including cultural traditions, language roots, and osteological evidence, clearly establishes a firm Polynesian context for the prehistoric inhabitants of Rapa Nui (for instance, Baker & Gill 1997, 54; Finney & Alexander 1997; Golson 1965; Lee 1997, 8; Swindler et al. 1997, 167; Van Tilburg 1994). The fame of Rapa Nui is not, however, predicated on its remoteness but on the dramatic scale of monumentality that is present across the island. Dotted around the coastline are a series of raised stone platforms (*ahu*) on which once stood large stone statues known as *moai*. The *moai* represent one of the most iconic images of Polynesian monumentality (Figure 12.2). To emphasise their extraordinary scale, the heads of the *moai* were frequently adorned with cylinder-shaped red stone topknots known as *pukao*.

The *ahu* and *moai* are not the only outstanding features of the Rapanui past. The large number of petroglyphs on the island stand out in the broader context of Pacific rock-art in terms of their scale, quality, and diversity (Lee 2001, 583; Lee & Stasack 1999, 165–66). In technique, the petroglyphs are incised,

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**Figure 12.1** Position of Rapa Nui within the Polynesian triangle (map adapted by Colin Richards).

grooved, bas-relief, and painted, sometimes being carved in a truly exquisite manner. They occur on a variety of media, ranging from flat lava flows (*papa*) to large rounded boulders and to the surfaces of *moai* and *pukao*. Their depiction is broad and includes sea creatures, human faces, birdmen, canoes, and so forth (Lee 1992, 2004, 1997).

Although the monuments have begun to be placed in a ‘landscape’ context (for example, Hamilton et al. 2008), petroglyphs continue to inhabit a totally different realm of archaeological interpretation. In this chapter we argue that



**Figure 12.2** Inland facing *moai* standing on *ahu* Nau nau, Anakena Bay (photo Colin Richards).

not only is such a disjunction prohibitive to understanding the role and nature of ‘rock-art’ in prehistoric Rapa Nui but also that petroglyphs actually provide an essential interpretative route into prehistoric Polynesian understandings of landscape (or islandscape) as cosmology.

We draw on fieldwork undertaken in 2009 (Cristino et al. 2009) and investigate the deployment of petroglyphs within a particular landscape context and show that through the heuristic of ‘wrapping’, and metaphorical extension of the tattooed body, it is possible to provide an interpretation of the Rapanui landscape as a ‘living’ cosmological construct. This is a complex and substantial topic, so here our analysis is restricted to an examination of the large extinct volcano of Rano Kau situated on the southwest corner of the island.

### Wrapping Things

Wrapping things is an activity familiar to everyone. A pile of wrapped gifts lying beneath the tree on Christmas Eve presents a comforting and emotive image of the festive season. However, the idea of wrapping is not restricted merely to presents and presentation; as a mode of practice it has also been described as constituting a structuring or ordering principle of society (Hendry 1993, 1; Moeran 1990, 2), or as a ‘stimulating analytical metaphor’ (Ben-Ari 1990, 225). Although the practice of wrapping is almost universally employed, as a social strategy it takes on quite different connotations in

particular societies, a situation that is aptly demonstrated in Hendry's analysis of Japanese society (1990, 1993).

Binding or wrapping represents a potent mode of analogical practice in a Polynesian context as a strategy of containment and protection. This role is most potently manifest in ritual contexts. In many societies, there is a fundamental categorical difference between gods and the living—it is never possible for them to come into direct contact. However, in Polynesian cosmology, there is no differentiation. Rather than being dichotomous, the relationship between deities and the living is one of points along a continuum, fused within genealogies (Shore 1989, 164). However, deities remain sacred and, more important, are the source of *mana*. *Mana* is genealogically passed from deities to people, through ancestral lines of ascent. Hence, *mana* is contained within, and articulated through, people and is essential for potency and social reproduction. The efficacy of *mana* is realised only in action and event. Consequently, there is a dependency on ritual transactions for the transference of *mana* for social reproduction. Because of the lack of categorical distinction between deities and living people, such exchanges are highly dangerous and so need to be contained, structured, and controlled through *tapu*. Through prescriptive rules and practices, *tapu* effects a state that demarcates, controls, and channels *mana*. This control is absolutely necessary, because such transactions also represent a breach between the cosmological realms of *Ao* (the upper world of light and the living) and *Po* (the sacred underworld of the ancestors).

In such contexts, wrapping or binding is a vital organ of *tapu*, since it is a technology of protection and containment. A consequence of thinking about the process of wrapping is that it stresses the critical importance of interfaces, skins, and membranes. This in turn broadens the possibilities of wrapping beyond protection and containment to include:

1. Concealment (allowing the potential of disclosure)
2. Unification
3. Re-presentation

Thinking about skins and membranes as forms of wrapping is important for a number of reasons. First, the emphasis is on practice—the wrapping of something, which leads directly to the converse possibility of unwrapping as a practice of disclosure and revelation. This practice also places greater interest on the mode and manner of wrapping, which is not merely something that separates or divides but that constitutes a skin or membrane that holds significance in its own form and materiality.

Skins or membranes are potentially paradoxical entities in that, although physically containing and concealing, they also advertise and draw attention to that being concealed. This paradox can be best described as wrapping as a mechanism of *indication*, whereby that which is being indicated is also

necessarily hidden or obscured. Perhaps under such circumstances wrapping may additionally be conceived as an *embrace* of that concealed. This wrapping propagates a conjunction and intimacy between the practice, form, and materiality of wrapping and what it is that is being wrapped.

### **From *Ao* to *Po*: Tattooing as a Protective Membrane**

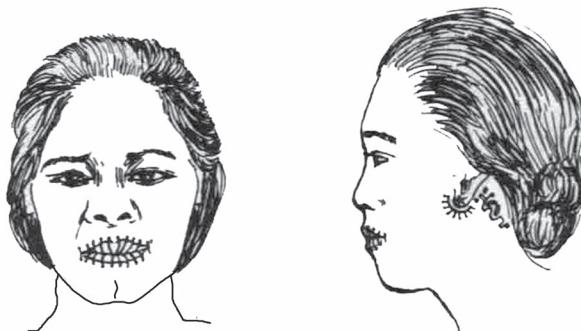
Both Kaeppeler (1988) and Gell (1993) have provided analyses of Polynesian tattooing with the basic thesis being that the tattoo acts as a second skin, a membrane of *tapu* reduction. Although such a ‘skin’ is acquired differently throughout Polynesia, in principle it relates to a barrier providing a sacred level of protection. Additionally, Kaeppeler (1988, 66) details how tattooing was used for spiritual and physical protection on body areas not covered by the woven or feather cloak or, in the case of Rapa Nui, a barkcloth (*tapa*) cloak (2001, 35). Moreover, the cloak, *tapa* cloth, and tattoos bound and wrapped the body, adding to the genealogical, symbolic, and sacred protection of the wearer during essential but hazardous transactions between people and deities. Thus the tattoo can be said to operate as a function of the *tapu* system (for example, Allen 1997, 341). This protective function is particularly well attested to in relation to the practice of tattooing the female right hand in the Marquesas (Handy 2008 [1922], 5). This is precisely the hand that not only comes into direct contact with a corpse through the application of coconut oil but also is employed in the serving of the fermented breadfruit *popoi* from a bowl (*ibid.*; Gell 1993, 215). A similar protective role has been ascribed to the tattooed female hands of ancient Hawai‘i (Allen 1997, 343).

Polynesian ritual transactions involving transformation and social reproduction are necessarily homologous to the original cosmogonic event. Generally speaking, the creation of the Polynesian world occurred with the brief fusion of the complimentary and antagonistic opposites *Po* (dark, underworld, inner, earth, female) and *Ao* (light, upperworld, outer, sky, male) (for example, Goldman 1970, 37; Handy 1927, 34–39). Subsequently, they remained ‘cosmic principles constituting the dual order of the universe’ (Bausch 1978, 175). The manifestation of *Ao* and *Po* is complex. For example, Handy muses on the way *Po*, recognised as both sacred and an underworld, was frequently associated with a gender and locality or place (1927, 34–35), such as *Hawaiki*, but ultimately concludes that ‘it should be regarded more properly as signifying a state of existence’ (*ibid.*, 69). This interpretation of the nature of *Po* is effective in portraying the ambiguity and relational nature of cosmological structures. For instance, in Hawaiian cosmology, the inner body as a container of *Po* is separated from the external world (*Ao*) by the tattooed skin (Sowell 1998). Such identification is directly linked back to cosmogony, as in the Maori belief that the ‘dark womb is identified with *Po* and seen as a space serving as the location for a creation’ (Bausch 1978, 174).

Polynesian social reproduction as a consequence of *mana* therefore required the conjunction of one realm with the other—the ‘irruption’ of *Po* into *Ao* (Gell 1993, 126). Obviously, for this irruption to occur a conduit was required between the two realms. In the context of the body, ‘orifices were important in Polynesian thought because they played a central role in the channelling of *mana* between the realms of *Ao* and *Po*’ (Shore 1989, 147). Linkage between *Ao* and *Po* was therefore manifest in the flow of substances via bodily orifices or transgressions of the skin, including tattooing (Sowell 1998, 338). Such a process is fraught with danger, requiring great protection through *tapu* in the form of wrapping and binding. This is precisely the role of the tattoo, in both execution and function; the process of tattooing opens a pathway for the transference of *mana* (*ibid.*, 338). As Sowell notes, ‘by merging the spiritual and physical self, the resulting tattoo protected, defined and spiritually enhanced the person’ (*ibid.*, 339).

Given this role, it is of little surprise that in several locations in east Polynesia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) tattooing focuses on facial orifices. In the literature on Polynesian tattooing much discussion has centred on male tattooing (for example, Gell 1993; Handy 2008 [1922]). Nonetheless, as Gell (1993, 204–05) declares, there are clear differences in the nature of male and female tattoos and tattooing. This differentiation we suggest is a manifestation of the differential status of women accorded by Hanson (1982) as attracting deities and representing a passageway between the sacred and human realms of existence. This situation gave women a status that is both powerful and dangerous (Arredondo 2000, 46), capable of destroying *mana* and removing taboos (Arredondo 2003, 24). In the context of a potential conduit between the realms of *Ao* and *Po*, the association of the ‘female principle’ with the more sacred *Po* as a state of existence takes on greater import. As Thomas observes, the vagina, through menstruation and childbirth, was the most potent of these channels, acting ‘like *other* orifices, as a conduit between this world and the other’ (1990, 70, *our italics*). Unlike the vagina, which is covered, wrapped, and bound by clothing, other orifices such as the mouth, ears, and nose are revealed and unprotected.

Female facial tattoos of east Polynesia and Aotearoa tend to focus on the mouth (Figure 12.3). For example, Maori female tattooing was known as *taanga ngutu* (‘lip-weaving’) (Best 1904, 170). Women’s tattoos of the mouth were not restricted to the outer lips but were also applied on the inner lips up to the gums (Robley 1896, 33–47). The application of tattoos to the lips and ears was also a feature of women’s tattooing in the Marquesas. The designs of the lips were called *konihō*, resembling teeth (*niho*); and those of the ears, *omua puaina* (Handy 2008 [1922], 28). Thomson (2007 [1891], 466) observes that on Rapa Nui women were tattooed with more elaborate designs and ‘the lips were freely tattooed after the manner of the Maoris, with lines curving around the chin and extending to the cheekbones’ (*ibid.*, 467).



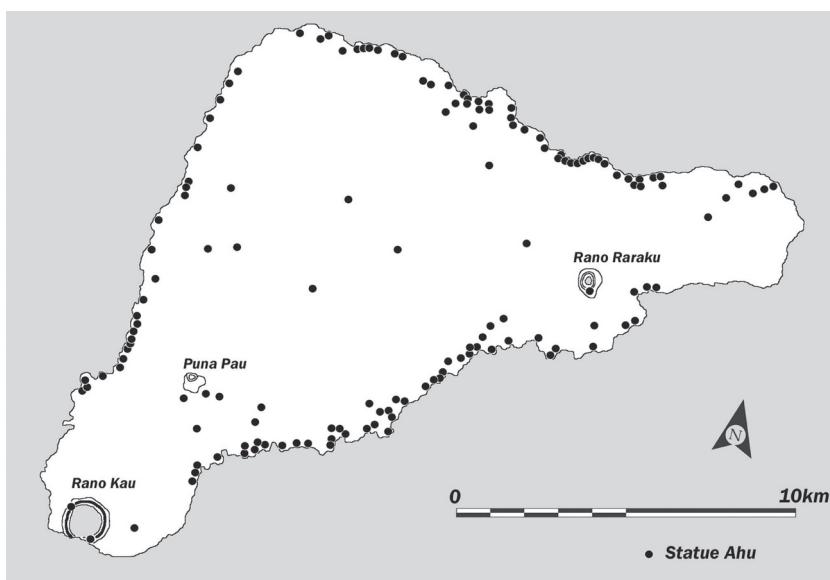
**Figure 12.3** Female facial tattoos in the Marquesas (after Handy 1922, Plate VI, A).

At a general level, we can agree with Kaeppeler (1988) and Gell (1993) that tattooing in east Polynesia was a process of inscription on the skin that acted as an additional protective membrane. Since it is the connectivity between people and deities that is at issue, orifices, as conduits between *Ao* and *Po*, are particularly ambiguous and dangerous features. We suggest this vulnerability seems to be of greater potency for Polynesian women (cf. Hanson 1982) and consequently female tattooing concentrated on uncovered body orifices, particularly the mouth and lips. A further link between women and tattooing lies in Rapanui mythology, which describes how female spirits introduced the practice of tattooing, with the process of beautification through tattooing also believed to ascribe the wearer with *mana* (Arredondo 2000, 42; Kaeppeler 2001, 37).

We now extend the themes outlined in this discussion of tattooing in order to provide an insight into how the Polynesian inhabitants of Rapa Nui necessarily created landscape as cosmology.

### **Volcanoes, Caves, and Petroglyphs: Rapa Nui Doorways to Another World**

In size, Rapa Nui is actually very small, comprising an area of only c. 64 square miles. The island has a triangular shape, having been formed by the sequential eruption of three great volcanoes, Poike, Rano Kau, and Terevaka (Fischer & Love 1993, 1–3). These are now extinct, but their volcanic cones effectively define and dominate each corner of the island, with spectacular sea cliffs up to 300 m in height forming the seaward sides of both Rano Kau in the southwest and Poike in the east (Figure 12.4). Of the three formative volcanoes, only Rano Kau retains a large crater or caldera, c. 1.6 km in diameter, which today contains a freshwater lake (Figure 12.5). Rano Raraku, the famous *moai* quarry, is the only other extinct volcano on the island comparable to Rano Kau in terms of either crater size or the presence of a sizable internal freshwater



**Figure 12.4** The topography of Rapa Nui and distribution of monumental *ahu* triangle (map adapted by Colin Richards).

lake (Figures 12.4 and 12.6). Inland, several smaller extinct volcanic cones project skywards effectively punctuating views across the land.

The open, barren appearance of the island interior today is mainly illusory in respect to the prehistoric past. Lush palm-tree cover greeted the arrival of the first Polynesians when they stepped ashore (for example, Flenley 1993; Flenley & Bahn 2002, 78–88; Flenley et al. 1991). Through this vegetation cover, the volcanic hills and cones would have projected above the tree line.

Because of its volcanic origins and the presence of numerous lava tubes, Rapa Nui is also an island of caves. Caves abound in both inland and coastal areas, providing a honeycomb of subterranean passages. In size, the caves vary dramatically. Some are large, open-mouthed, and cavernous, such as Ana Kai Tangata on the southwestern shore and the inland cavern of Ana Te Pahu. Others are much smaller, with narrow concealed entrances and restricted chambers, a situation so vividly and claustrophobically described by Thor Heyerdahl (1958) in his book *Aku Aku*. Consequently, concealed below the bright, hot, rocky, surface of the island is a dark, cool, and secret subterranean world.

Together, these natural features constituted the lived and experienced island world of the prehistoric people in Rapa Nui. However, at the end of a person's life it was time for the soul to leave the island and to travel back to *Hiva*, the Rapa Nui equivalent of *Hawaiki*. To gain access to *Hiva* necessarily involved passing into the realm of *Po*. Throughout Polynesia “it was generally



**Figure 12.5** The caldera of Rano Kau (photo Colin Richards).



**Figure 12.6** Sea creatures swirling around the large boulder (photo Colin Richards).

believed that there was a definite route or path taken by souls of the departed on their way to the next world" (Handy 1927, 71). To access this ancestral realm generally involved travelling along a road (*ara*) in a westerly direction to a coastal location where the spirit 'jumped off' into the depths of the ocean to continue its journey westward and downward (see Richards et al. 2011 for further discussion of ancestral *ara*). Passage along the spirit *ara* was punctuated by a number of 'stopping or gathering places' where the ultimate fate of the spirit was negotiated (for instance, Handy 1927, 71–74; Williamson 1937, 275). Consequently, the spirit *ara* is an uncertain path to follow:

The souls of the Marquesans passed along the high mountain ridge that forms the backbone of the main island of their group to the high promontory at the west called Kiukiu. As they marched along the path of souls, the ghosts could be seen dressed in their white garments (mortuary wrappings), avoiding the valleys lest they be caught in the bush. . . . On their way the souls (or ghosts) strengthened themselves for their coming ordeals by bathing in a cool pool of water. Below the promontory was a rock. When the souls clapped their hands this opened, the sea rolled back, and the soul entered the nether world. (Handy 1927, 72)

The journey of the soul along the spirit *ara* in Aotearoa (New Zealand) is essentially identical in that it followed the mountain ranges north to Te Reinga, near the North Cape, where on the rocky cliff face 'there grew an ancient pohutukawa, and from this tree the souls leapt to a cave in the water below (Hiroa 1958, 429; Orbell 1985a, 78).

These accounts of the passage taken by the soul back to *Hawaiki* are illuminating. They each involve both entering the ocean and a cave. This duality reverses the qualities and necessities of birth, embracing both the transformatory qualities of voyaging to *Hawaiki* (see Richards 2008) and the passage into the sacred subterranean world of *Po*. Frequently, the duality of the journey of the soul is also manifest in the treatment of the physical body after death. For example, there is extensive evidence of subterranean burial in caves from across eastern Polynesia, including Aotearoa (Orbell 1985b, 84–85) and Rapa Nui (for instance, Métraux 1940, 118; Shaw 2000). In some places, such as Hawai'i and the Marquesas, the corpse was actually placed in or with a canoe (for example, Handy 1923, 108; Kirch 1985, 175–77, 218–19), facilitating the journey to *Hawaiki*.

On Rapa Nui, Rano Kau has been suggested to be a similar 'jumping-off point (Barthel 1978, 219; Lee 1992, 130). Rano Kau is undoubtedly a spectacular volcanic cone; its lip is composed of a series of strikingly shaped, black basalt outcrops punctuated by grassy patches. Internally, the walls of the crater or caldera plunge down to an area of vegetation encircling a large freshwater lake. At a general level, Rano Kau conforms to the Polynesian identification of extinct volcanic craters being conduits to the underworld *Po* (for instance, Bausch 1978, 175; Williamson 1933, 362). More specifically, Rano Kau is the place where the mythical leader of the first Polynesians to settle on Rapa Nui,

Hotu Matu'a, selects for his death (Métraux 1940, 68). It is at Maea Hono, a striking 3-m-high pillar of rock on the rim of Rano Kau, that according to McCoy (1968), Hotu Matu'a shouts his last words to *Hiva*. Conversely, Barthel (1978, 219–20), following Routledge (2005 [1919], 280), presents an account of Hotu Matu'a shouting his last words on the western rim of Rano Kau at Orongo.

That the crater Rano Kau was the ‘jumping off place for souls’ is suspected by Barthel (1978, 223), and he notes that the crater was originally named Poko Uri, which translates as ‘dark hole, black night, dark underworld’ (*ibid.*). Lee (1992, 130) agrees with this designation, adding that Rano Kau is the western-most point of Rapa Nui, typical of Polynesian jumping off places and, as such, represents one of the most important features on the island. Taken together the evidence is compelling.

Hidden in dense vegetation at the base of the crater is Hau Koka, a cluster of rocks covered by ‘the most impressive collections of petroglyphs on the island’ (Lee 1992, 164). The arrangement of decorated rocks is instructive. The most famous is a beautifully decorated rounded boulder set back c. 10 m from the edge of the lake. In terms of composition and application ‘there is . . . nothing equal to it in all of Polynesia’ (*ibid.*). Overall, the boulder measures c. 3 m in diameter and is decorated over its surface with a series of amazing sea creatures, one of which has a human head (Figure 12.6). A series of smaller decorated rocks run down toward the lake, where a single large rock acts as a natural platform adjacent to the water’s edge (Figure 12.7). This rock



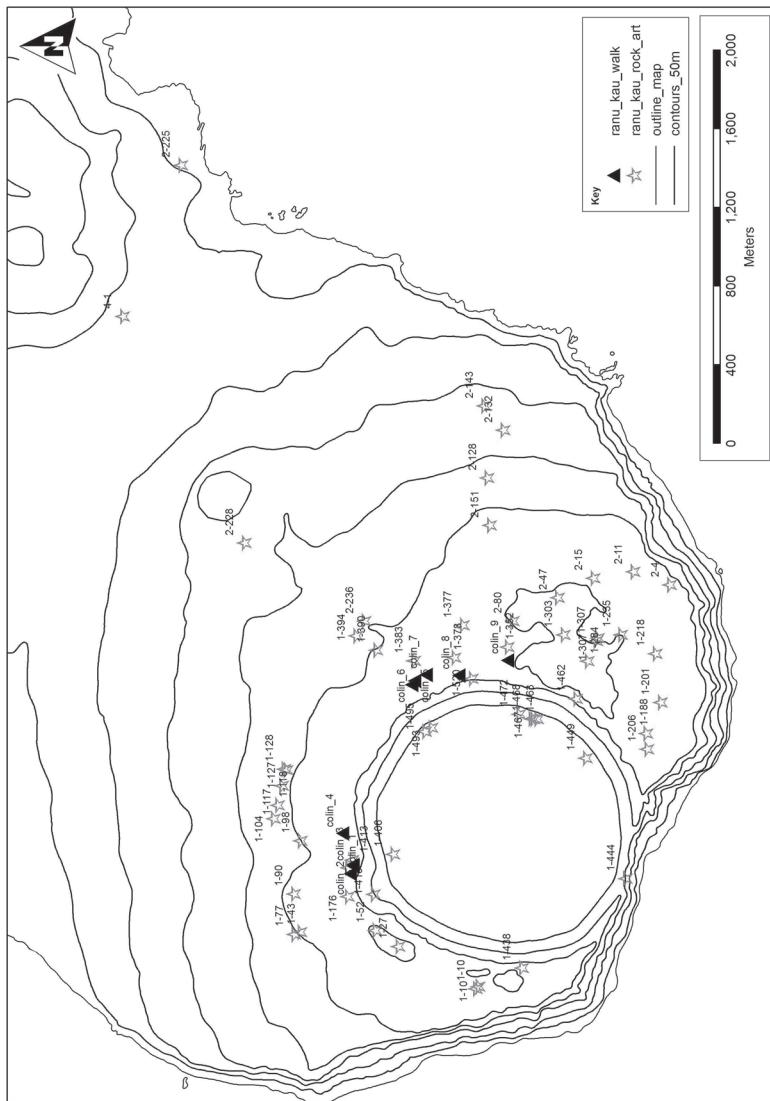
**Figure 12.7** The decorated rock at the water’s edge; the point of entry into *Po* (photo Colin Richards).

is decorated with a series of petroglyphs, including three carved bowls. The question arises as to why some of the most amazing petroglyphs in Rapa Nui are inscribed on a concealed series of boulders and rocks adjacent to the lake edge at the base of the Ran Kau crater. We suggest that there can be little doubt that this is the final jumping place into the crater lake to enable the entry of souls down to the underworld realm of *Po*.

The petroglyphs wrap around the boulders and stones at Hau Koka in a most comprehensive and emphatic manner. There are other petroglyphs recorded at another fourteen points within the crater (McCoy 1968), including a cave high up on the southwest slope. However, none compare with the outstanding adornment of Hau Koka (Lee 1992, 165). The passage of the dead is an ambiguous and fearsome event, because it constitutes the return of persons to the sanctity of *Po*. Here we follow Rainbird (2002, 2008) in relating the tattooing of the skin with ink and images to the tattooing of the land with paint and petroglyphs. Just as the tattooing of the female right hand in the Marquesas (Handy 2008 [1922], 5) effected a protective membrane to the pollution of touching the dead, so the tattooing of the rocks with petroglyphs at Hau Koka provided protection against the souls of the dead. This *tapu* was essential, since such a metamorphosis represented the ‘irruption’ of *Po* into *Ao* (Gell 1993, 126). Rano Kau acted as the main conduit from the inhabited realm of *Ao* to the sacred underworld *Po*. It is therefore essentially an orifice or passage between the two states (Bausch 1978, 175). At particular moments, a conjunction or irruption occurs, caused perhaps by the passage of souls or other forms of ritual transaction taking place at Hau Koka.

During the extensive archaeological survey undertaken by McCoy (1968, 1976), and subsequent rock art surveys by Lee (for example, 1992, 1993), substantial numbers of petroglyph sites were discovered around the rim of Rano Kau. As Lee (1992, 158) notes, their scattered distribution reflects the availability of appropriate rock outcrops, although it is notable that not all rock surfaces were chosen for inscription. One site in particular on the west side of the caldera, at Mata Ngarau, Orongo, is world famous for its spectacular bird-man petroglyphs. However, other less known petroglyph sites are present on rock outcrops around the volcano rim (Figures 12.8 and 12.9). Some of these sites, such as Vai Atare and Te Vare, are also extensive and contain a range of well-executed designs, including, birdmen, makemake faces, fish, comet-tails, cup-marks, and lines. An intriguing aspect of some of these sites is that the petroglyphs are cut into inaccessible rock faces on the very lip of the crater. As Lee perceptively comments: ‘this placement indicates that the designs were not created for general viewing but more likely were offerings for the gods; another possible explanation is that the act of their creation was more important than their being seen’ (*ibid.*, 159).

These are not mutually exclusive interpretations. Again, the distribution of these petroglyphs can be likened to the female facial tattoos of east Polynesia



**Figure 12.8** Distribution of petroglyphs around the caldera of Rano Kau (figure courtesy of Kate Welham).



**Figure 12.9** Petroglyphs at Te Vare on the western rim of the Rano Kau caldera (photo Colin Richards).

and Aotearoa, which tend to centre on the mouth. Recall also that women's facial tattoos were not restricted to the outer lips but were also applied to the concealed areas within the mouth, such as the inner lips up to the gums (Robley 1896, 33–47). The observation of women's facial tattoos has interesting implications for gendered aspects of landscape. Note, however, that in the deployment of rock-art at Rano Kau we are witnessing a homology between the tattoos of the mouth and the petroglyphs of the volcano. In this instance, a Polynesian landscape is cosmologically constituted in the same way as the human body.

Let us now consider Lee's second line of interpretation for a moment, that of the importance of the practices of petroglyph creation. The process of carving and tattooing is often viewed as bringing on ancestral benevolence (Coward & Gamble 2010; Henare 2005); the processes of making are thus not simply for the achievement of the final design or tattoo. The process of tattooing, argues Gell (1993, 304), involves three stages: incision, healing, and the final image, the last being permanently marked on the body. It is also apparent that these stages are replicated in the production of rock-art on the black basalt of Rano Kau. Apart from bas-relief carving, petroglyphs are incised or pecked into the rock. The eventual darkening and 'healing' of the image follows an intermediate period of fresh scarring, white against the black.

Just as tattoos wrap the bodies of people, so petroglyphs wrap the land. The practices of tattooing and rock-art create openings, or *ara*, channelling

*mana* between the realms of *Ao* and *Po*. Spoken chants are captured within the openings and sealed in through the healing process (Gell 1993, 57; Kaeppler 1989, 168); thus the processes of rock-art and tattooing may have been equally wrapped by sound. The production of sound, through pecking into the rock, has been recognised as an important aspect of petroglyph production (cf. Ouzman 2001; Rainbird 2002) and may account for small rock-carved cupules. The practice of tattooing is highly dangerous and controlled and contained by *tapu*. Just as restrictions are placed on tattooer and tattooed alike, both during the penetration of the skin and during the subsequent healing period (for example, Sowell 1998, 339), so similar sanctions and restrictions could accompany the creation of rock-art. In short, we can concur with Lee (1992, 159) in suggesting the practices of rock-art production were equally important as the final petroglyph.

The evidence suggests that beyond the image-wrapped Rano Kau, other conduits to the underworld may exist, through caves. There are several cave entrances that have been inscribed with rock-art; frequently these feature makemake faces or komari, the latter symbol particularly associated with protection (Lee 1987, 52; 1992, 195). For the Rano Kau crater, McCoy observed rock-art both in a cave located on the exterior edge of the volcano crater, containing a komari motif (McCoy 1968, 1–27), and in another cave on the interior slope containing makemake faces and birdman motifs, which McCoy describes as indicating an ‘important site’ (1968, 1–438). Rock-art has also been documented in caves around the coastal regions of poike, the north shores above Anakena, and the small islands of Motu Iti and Motu Nui. Additional discoveries are undoubtedly yet to be made; a recent survey of 314 of Rapa Nui’s caves have documented petroglyphs, including the makemake, the birdman, and komari motifs, as well as depictions of fish and plants (Ciszewski, Zdzislaw, & Szelerewicz 2010, 90). Further survey and research promises to reveal additional evidence for the wrapping of these features in motifs as conduits to the underworld.

### Cosmological Landscapes: Petroglyphs as Tattooing and Wrapping the Land

Although there have been extensive research concerned with Rapa Nui petroglyphs (for example, Lavachery 1939; Lee 1992, 1993, 2000), there is a tendency, as with rock-art studies more generally, for such art to be viewed almost independently of other archaeological evidence (see, however, Van Tilburg & Lee 1987). There are numerous reasons for this cleavage, not least because of the notorious difficulties of establishing accurate absolute or relational chronologies. Moreover, a concern with both the aesthetic and communicative aspects of rock-art has led to an almost subdisciplinary status for rock-art studies in archaeology. This general trend is certainly visible in studies

of Rapa Nui prehistory. Because the prehistory of Rapa Nui is represented as ‘phased’ chronological units (for instance, Martinsson-Wallin 1994, 83–84; Skjølsvold 1993, 94; Smith 1961, 212; Van Tilburg 1994), ‘period’ disjunction inevitably occurs. The majority of petroglyphs are often consigned to a date or phase later than the classic period of *ahu* and *moai* monumentality, thereby by default decreasing their importance.

The petroglyphs of Rapa Nui, however, are not confined to a later prehistoric date (cf. Van Tilburg & Lee 1986). Lee demonstrates that, in some contexts, a process of superimposition occurs, effectively revealing their continual application throughout prehistory. For instance, the komari and ship motifs consistently appear to postdate images of the birdman and makemake (Lee 1987, 52; 1992, 195). Nor should petroglyphs be considered as some form of aesthetic epiphenomena, that is, as something that is merely decorative in content and, in the absence of social context, essentially impossible to interpret meaningfully. On the contrary, we suggest that while petroglyphs may be understood in terms of aesthetics and communication, they also constitute a form of inscriptive practice that is transformative in nature. Moreover, when considered alongside other forms of inscriptive technologies, especially of the body, the rock-art of Rapa Nui assumes paramount significance in our understanding the construction and constitution of apparently alien Polynesian worlds and landscapes.

Tattooing and rock-art wrap the body and the landscape and are a necessary component of *tapu*, mediating the transference of *mana*. Protection is needed to negotiate the danger associated with *Man* and states of *Tapu*, and this protection is provided through wrapping in images during the processes of tattooing and rock-art. Uncovered orifices, as apertures between the realms of *Ao* and *Po* and conduits to the underworld, require extra protection. Such orifices include the human mouth on females, regarded as potent and potentially dangerous, the volcano craters, and caves. The body and the landscape are wrapped through these inscriptive practices of protection.

In this chapter we have investigated how the concept of wrapping can be used as an interpretative device for understanding the processes of marking the body and the land on Rapa Nui. Further research will elucidate the role of wrapping beyond the Rano Kau volcano focused on here by exploring these themes for the rest of Rapa Nui and by setting them within broader Polynesian cosmological beliefs.

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